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The Collapse of our NDP Work in Ontario and some Lessons for the Future

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Toronto Local, East Branch (see correspondence Jan.12/22)

(Part 1 of 2; a critique of the politics of the LSA leadership -- Web Ed.)

a) Introduction

The appearance of the Waffle in the NDP which resulted in the broadest and most powerful left-wing formation in our entire CCF-NDP experience has had a profoundly unsettling effect on the maturing process of the only existing party of independent working class political action in North America. For the whole past period, the Waffle has seriously upset the consolidation of the reformist leadership's grip over the party and has opened the NDP up to many currents in the new radicalization: currents awakened by the war in Vietnam, student radicals, women, and those concerned about the economic integration and domination of Canada's economy by the U.S. colossus, a concern which is beginning to pervade all sectors of society including the working class.

Even today, with the Waffle dispatched outside the party, with the NDP holding office in three provinces, without an organized, coherent socialist opposition within the NDP, the party leadership still has not established firm control over its membership, whose unease and discontent is still evident. Objectively, the NDP is still more open to the ongoing radicalization that is taking place in the country than it was before the Waffle experience.

A balance sheet must now be drawn of the Waffle experience, an experience that we greeted and embraced to the full, and of our intervention in that experience, our attempt to direct the Waffle more fully into the NDP, to root its radicalism in the ranks of the working class elements in the NDP.

This balance sheet cannot be limited by the narrow vision of the P.C. majority (*Political Committee, governing cross-country body of the LSA/LSO --Web ed.)* on the rise of a new nationalism in English Canada. For this reason, this contribution agrees with the criticisms of comrade Dowson regarding the simplistic, self-propheying stand of the P.C. majority in its evaluation of the Waffle experience as a debacle, a stand which breaks from and rejects our previous correct approach to the Waffle.

The fundamental flaws in the P.C. majority's positions are most clearly apparent when we undertake the urgently needed stocktaking of the condition of our work presently in the NDP. Hence, the first part of this contribution will attempt to detail and evaluate the reasons behind the general failure of our NDP work, our failure to take root in the NDP, and the unhealthy situation in the Ontario Left Caucus where an imminent blow-up is being posed by various ultra-left forces within that caucus.

There is an agonizing question that we must now deal with in making our balance sheet. Why, after this turbulent period in the NDP, why, after the conclusion of the gestation process represented by the Waffle (a process during which we had a correct theoretical grasp of the situation, although we lacked the necessary organizational leverage and cadre, as the 1971 Plenum document evaluated), are we now left empty-handed and isolated in the Left Caucus?

Why are we now reduced to a shaky alliance with neophyte ultra-left elements which, coincidentally, we found ourselves at loggerheads with a year ago within the Waffle, elements we have been fighting against years before the Orillia confrontation (*during which the Waffle was forced to disband --Web Ed.*) over the question of whether the Waffle should reject the NDP?

b) The present status of the Left Caucus

Let us begin with a balance sheet of the Left Caucus as it exists now and the direction in which it is moving.

Despite the effective floor rallies led by the Left Caucus at the last ONDP convention around some key left issues such as "Peace-keeping" and the need for public ownership of resources (an issue popularized by the Waffle), the Left Caucus today is on the verge of blowing apart. Why is this the case?

From its inception, the Left Caucus has been unable to activate to any significant extent the remaining pro-Waffle elements of the NDP, many of which still look to the Laxer leadership for political direction and are simply observing the Left Caucus from the sidelines.

Many of the not insignificant independents that we won over at the Delaware conference to the stay-and-fight perspective, even the much-discussed forces from Windsor and Sudbury — never made it as far as to attend the ONDP convention or even the founding conference of the Left Caucus itself.

Even in early September 1972, during our attempts to organize this conference, while we were engaged in a fight to block a sectarian program for the Left Caucus, these militants looked on the discussions as a strictly Trotskyist battleground, reducing them to passive spectators, and failing to draw them into the important discussions that should have been taking place.

Even today, as the right-wing leadership goes about re-consolidating their hold on riding after riding, the "afficionados" of the ultraleft Red Circle and Old Mole and elements in the LSA cannot see the handwriting on the wall. If they do see the increasing consolidation of the reformist leadership over the riding associations they disclaim responsibility for it through their defeatist attitude that nothing more could have been done. This coincides and justifies their own **real** orientation to the self-stylized "vanguard elements". With this background in mind, we can begin to understand the recent ultraleft antics of the caucus. These antics included the projection at a February Left Caucus meeting of an open confrontation with the NDP leadership over sending Canadian "observers" to Vietnam by organizing a picket line supposedly in the name of some left riding associations. This projection, which was made by our own comrades in the Left Caucus, and similar confrontations, cannot tap the resentment against the NDP leadership that can still be found among the NDP membership. It goes strictly over the heads of the rank and file members of the party. It is based on a complete misreading of the situation in the NDP.

At a March 23rd meeting of the Beaches-Woodbine riding association, one day after MP Rowland's statement in the House that the NDP parliamentary caucus opposed continued participation by Canada in the I.C.C.S. (*the International Control Commission, a U.S. military-dominated so-called overseeing agency in Vietnam- Web ed.*), the Red Circle, spearheaded by Joe Flexer and Steve Penner, could not rise above sectarian declamations that the NDP was not anti-imperialist. How devoid of a propagandistic and explanatory character their intervention was can be seen clearly in the inability of these elements to explain the left's fundamental opposition to international supervision as a foil for legitimizing the false U.S.

propaganda view of the Vietnamese revolution as an aggressive war from the North, of how Canadian participation on the I.C.C.S. sanctioned, by its very nature, continued outside interference in the affairs of the Vietnamese people, who want nothing more than to expel the Saigon puppets from their country. Such explanations, such propaganda work was totally absent. Perhaps, it would have required too much patience.

More significant yet, the substantial and highly articulate Left Caucus forces in this riding association should have undertaken themselves to intervene with this propagandists approach. However, it appears they were not involved in the discussion to any significant extent. Needless to say, this kind of intervention turned more into a rout for the Caucus than a victory.

As we set our sights to the Federal Convention, we find ourselves with a "Left Caucus Manifesto" being forced on the Ontario Left Caucus. This "Manifesto" is a sectarian gambit, a declaration of empty "revolutionary" rhetoric which in no way addresses itself to the ranks of the party. In the formal and sterile denunciations of reformism, which are projected in the draft outline, the "Manifesto" is totally devoid of a really effective counter-offensive socialist program. The approach to politics expressed by the "Manifesto" places it beyond the orbit of the NDP and could serve as a cover for these elements pulling out from, or slowly backing out of the NDP itself. Since this "Manifesto" rejects the existing NDP all the way down the line as a "hardened reformist" organization, this Manifesto effectively rejects the concept that the working class of Canada is going to go through a serious experience with the NDP, an experience which the LSA seeks to intervene in, to direct to its inevitable conclusion.

We must recognize that the Left Caucus is becoming rapidly isolated from the rank and file members of the NDP as a result of the splittist and sectarian direction imposed on it by the Red Circle and other assorted ultraleft forces, in conjunction with forces in our own movement.

These forces have dumped our analysis of the NDP as a labour party both on the road and blocking the road to socialism (*one of the slogans of the movement being "the NDP is both ON the road and IN the road to socialism" – Web ed.*) It is obvious that these forces disagree with our strategy and direction to build an ongoing socialist wing in the party based on a programmatic challenge to the leadership around a program of democratic and transitional demands aimed at exposing the reformist and parliamentary orientation of the NDP leadership.

"Winning the NDP to Socialism", our motto for winning over the ranks to a class struggle perspective and which embodied no illusions on our part that the NDP could be transformed, is ipso facto Utopian, these forces declare, because the NDP is a hardened, social-democratic formation – bourgeois in thrust.

Armed with this static revelation, which some of these forces have held even in the midst of the confrontation with the Waffle when all hell was breaking loose against the embattled Lewises (*NDP leadership – Web ed.*), these elements are now pushing their position to its logical conclusion. Our own leading comrades in this area of work who could have held this process in check, given the vacillation and paralysis of the Metro Toronto leadership and the central leadership of the LSA, are now making common cause with the ultralefts.

c) The role of the politics of the leadership

After more than a decade of a correct orientation to the NDP, which is something which we can hold up as an example to other sections, after years of building the LSA around this orientation, how is it possible for the P.C. majority, which was itself shaped by this experience and this orientation, to lose its way and get so completely bogged down?

To understand the indecision of the P.C. majority, to understand their zigzags and their adaptation both to the left and to the right (which we will detail later), we have to examine the basic determinants of the new line of the P.C. majority.

Comrade Dowson has already documented how the P.C. majority's wrong line on Canadian nationalism has been a key factor in shaping their thinking at the time of the (*Waffle*) Delaware conference and subsequent to it.

As one who participated in that conference and as one who admonished the Waffle that their nationalism would tend to "put socialism in the back seat" (and the position papers of the new MISC --Movement for an Independent and Socialist Canada-- did tend to lean in that direction), I must now admit that my predictions and those of the P.C. majority did not come true.

Recent experience with the Waffle, their striking and dramatic growth and the important socialist educational work they have done involving hundreds of newly radicalizing people proves, if anything, the very opposite. While we will evaluate the whole experience in more detail in the following pages, it is fundamentally correct to see the scuttling of our orientation to this new nationalism as the key error which has led to the unhinging of our traditional NDP line. From this wrong response to Canadian nationalism flows the uncritical adaptation towards the Red Circle, which after all was a rare commodity in that it too agreed with the P.C. majority's new line that there was a "nationalist threat" in Canada, a line that made its debut at the Delaware conference.

Our NDP work, which had picked up tremendously during the course of the Waffle defence work, was also to reach its apex in Orillia. At that time, many radicalizing independents were attracted by a revolutionary Marxist analysis of the NDP. This was the first time we intervened with some real leverage in the Waffle and with it in the NDP.

However, the independent elements were soon after discouraged by the narrow and factional wrangling of the caucus, its high pseudo-Trotskyist profile, and the fact that it didn't have a clear perspective, that it wasn't getting anywhere. After the ONDP convention, the caucus proved, in fact, incapable of reestablishing and rebuilding a political, programmatic challenge to the reformist NDP leadership around a broad range of meaningful issues.

In retrospect, we also have to take stock of the scandalous lack of direction from the P.C. majority, the tailing by our P.C. leadership of the comrades directing the work area who, in turn, tailed the politics of the Red Circle. Graphic evidence of the decay of the LSA's leadership in this area was the absence of Metro NDP reports to the Metro assemblies, the lack of concrete direction and the absence of consultation and meetings during periods when critical developments were taking place. The situation, in short, was a complete paralysis of the central leadership in dealing with the NDP area of work and a total failure on their part to do anything to reverse this degenerating situation. Nothing is more telling in this regard than the absence of a pre-convention document by the P.C. majority which could correctly evaluate the serious failure of the Left Caucus, especially now when the NDP question is becoming central to a discussion of the movement's overall work.

Instead of coming forth with such a document, the P.C. majority has chosen to characterize the work of the Left Caucus in the recent update of the political resolution (with) the following unperturbed simplicity:

"Rather than organize the struggle for democratic rights in the NDP, the Waffle leadership decided to bolt the party, pressing the Ontario Waffle to its split at the Delaware

conference in August 1972... The class-struggle socialists" (including the Red Circle, I assume? -H.K.) "founded the Left Caucus to continue the struggle to build a **mass left wing** in the NDP" (emphasis – H.K.)

Apart from the pages of criticism of the Waffle defectors, splitters and their "nationalist deviation", the document finds no room anywhere to record the simple fact that the bulk of the forces in the Left Caucus are anything but committed to build a mass left wing in the NDP. Perhaps that would be asking too much from an embattled P.C. majority which by now is completely removed and out of touch with developments in the NDP.

d) The Waffle experience, the purge and the bogey of nationalism

In a document of some fifty odd pages, three pages are set aside in the Political Resolution under the heading, "The Waffle Experience." The P.C. majority feels that the analysis they present in these three pages is now their final word on the Waffle and updates and supercedes the movement's previous assessment of Waffle work.

As a reference point in the discussion and for the benefit of some comrades who haven't been exposed to it previously let's flash back to the opening paragraphs of the Waffle's 1969 Manifesto:

"Our aim as democratic socialists is to build an independent socialist Canada. Our aim as supporters of the New Democratic Party is to make it a truly socialist party,

"The achievement of socialism awaits the building of a mass base of socialists in factories and offices, on farms and campuses. The development of socialist consciousness, on which can be built a socialist base, must be the first priority of the New Democratic Party.

"The New Democratic Party must be seen as the parliamentary wing of a movement dedicated to fundamental social change. It must be radicalized from within and it must be radicalized from without.

"THE MOST urgent issue for Canadians is the very survival of Canada. Anxiety is pervasive and the goal of greater economic independence receives widespread support. But economic independence without socialism is a sham, and neither are meaningful without true participatory democracy.

"The major threat to Canadian survival today is American control of the Canadian economy. The major issue of our times is not national unity but national survival, and the fundamental threat is external, not internal" (emphasis by the Web Ed.)

Is this the voice of classical bourgeois nationalism in a socialist disguise? Is this a nationalism playing into the hands of the bourgeoisie and if so wouldn't the Waffle experience have to be rejected in its entirety? But let us go back to what the political resolution says about the Waffle, experience now.

Right from the start, the P.C. contribution constitutes a re~ writing of our past positions on the Waffle.

"The NDP" (not the Waffle? - H.K.) "has proved to be a particularly powerful pole of attraction and expression for the radicalization in English Canada.

"The **youth** radicalization was quick to orient to the **NDP**" (my emphasis - H.K.) "We saw the first indications of this in 1967-68 in the positive response in NDP ranks, among younger members in particular, to the Socialist Caucus program and policies. The formation of the 'Waffle' caucus in 1969 ... further confirmed the validity of our longstanding orientation to the NDP. The Waffle advanced many of the key demands of the Socialist Caucus; support of student-faculty control, of women's liberation, of the antiwar movement, defense of Quebec's right to self-determination, its insistence that the NDP must attempt to lead extra-parliamentary anti-capitalist movements."

Check again! That's what it says about the Waffle and read on if you wish. Nowhere is there a mention of the Waffle slogan "For an Independent, Socialist Canada!" Wasn't that what the Waffle was really all about? Funny, but you'd never know from the P.C. majority's assessment.

Also, just for the record, didn't we say that it was through the **Waffle** that the youth radicalization was able to link up with the NDP and along with the Viet Nam war helped to limber up the party from its "hardening" which we noted in the 1966 convention.

The essential points in the August 1971 plenum's extensive analysis of the Waffle are summarized briefly in the Political Resolution and then the P.C. majority's new twist, their real insight, unfolds. After commenting on the "quick discouragement" in the Waffle after they failed to win the April '71 federal leadership convention, the document says, "All these problems came together and found a focus and theoretical rationale in the Waffle leadership's adaptation to and support of Canadian nationalism. They were given a **decisive push**" (my emphasis - H.K.) "from the NDP by the Ontario party leadership's moves in the spring of '72..."

But the fact is that the Waffle was nationalist from its very birth in 1969. At that time we described them as nationalist putting the word nationalist in quotation marks. To find its way around this sticky point, the P.C. majority conveniently tries to erase the past, and blithely denies the Waffle's most salient feature, the motor force of its call for an "independent socialist Canada" which we accepted within the framework of the NDP. Instead the P.C. is now having us believe that the Waffle was advancing the same basic "class struggle concepts" of the Socialist Caucus, until of course it went berserk on nationalism, presumably starting in mid-1971. But comrades, we said no such thing in our August '71 plenum assessment of the Waffle. Read the speeches out of Waterloo!

In their document, *Canada and the Crisis of World Imperialism*, the P.C. majority states, "the 1968 resolution on Canada-US relations described a sentiment but projected no movement to which it might give rise... It offered only a concept of sensitive orientation to an ill-defined sentiment -- **an Orientation that was to prove sterile and misdirected** (emphasis added --H.K.)

Here it is more boldly. The PC majority can no longer accept the fundamentally radical thrust of the Waffle, "nationalist" as we said it was, and instead downplays and reduces this very significant aspect in our movement's experience in the preceding five years to a non-event on our calendar of the growing radicalization. A more honest conclusion for the P.C. majority to draw would be that since we did not denounce the Waffle's nationalism until recently the LSA has been wrong from the start in supporting the Waffle!

No single movement has had more impact on contemporary Canadian class politics in popularizing the concepts of public ownership and in questioning the corporate structures of capitalism than the Waffle in the NDP. To deny this fact and to dismiss the Waffle experience as a debacle is to distort not only our movement's history and the correctness of our past orientation

regarding the Waffle, but to undermine the theoretical heritage and practical experience we have had in the NDP for many years.

Did the Waffle simply "defect" from the NDP, as the P.C. majority states in the Political Resolution? Let us examine exactly what happened. One of the big problems of the Waffle experience all along was how to integrate and direct the newly radicalized forces of the Waffle into the NDP given the objective fact that the radicalization had not yet taken hold among the class as a whole or penetrated deeply into the unions. This problem was dealt with at various points, and was posed in our confrontation with "ouvrierist" (*"workerist" – believers in spontaneous action by the working class – Web ed.*) elements around Jackie Larkin and Andy Wernick during the Texpack strike. These forces ridiculed the approach of "winning the NDP to socialism" and were chafing at the bit to bolt the party and set up a new fringe group of their own.

This problem was posed as a result of the uneven nature of the radicalization of the faster and deeper radicalization of young people in relation to the rest of the working class. Their inexperience and ignorance of what a party like the NDP was all about led many leaders of the Waffle especially Watkins, to shield and even to promote the get-out-of-the-NDP sentiment.

Another factor that strengthened the feeling (for) getting out of the NDP was the stream of Stalinist influence which afflicted the Waffle from its inception and which was clearly anti-NDP and nationalist* – *the school of the CP and their long-standing support of independence in Canada (without socialism) in the Cold War framework.

As a result of these objective and subjective factors, the Waffle was not as deeply rooted in the party nor as deeply committed to the strategic importance of the NDP as it should have been. Even following its enormously successful showing at the Federal NDP convention in 1971, the Waffle failed to root itself fully in the NDP.

The essence of our August 1971 critique of the Waffle was not directed against their "nationalism" (which we never objected to) but rather it was directed at the Waffle adherents' rejection of the strategic need for a revolutionary Leninist party to break the class from reformism and to lead a socialist transformation of society. As a corollary to this weakness, the Wafflers also tended to underestimate the degree to which the NDP was rooted in the working class and the trade union movement. These flaws led the Waffle leaders to make a slap-happy, freewheeling intervention in trade union politics, notably their actions around the Auto-pact and Texpack strikes. In addition, these flaws fed the illusions that the established leaderships of the NDP and the trade union movements could somehow be bypassed in the radicalization process or that they could be exposed from outside these structural frameworks. If anything these illusions were strengthened not weakened by the Waffle's surprisingly strong impact in the leadership contest in April.

These theoretical weaknesses, coupled with the flirtations some Wafflers had with ex-Stalinist trade union forces, was behind the Waffle's go-it-alone attitude at the Windsor Auto Pact Conference, which impatiently bypassed work through the official party channels, though it was clear that the NDP would have had to move on these issues eventually. The Windsor confrontation was, in fact, a full, frontal, broadside declaration of war against the UAW brass and this confrontation sent repercussions reeling throughout the top circles of the CLC hierarchy.

With this point of departure, it was relatively easy for the NDP leadership to move in on the Waffle and mobilize the trade union apparatus in preparation for the "kill" (*expulsion of Waffle from the NDP – Web ed.*)

As a result, the Orillia Council meeting was stacked with trade union delegates ready to dispatch the Waffle out of the party on a moment's notice. But the fact remains that the outcome of the Orillia Council "meeting was never in doubt. The negative outcome at Orillia was clearly predictable from an assessment of the objective balance of forces: within the party and the trade union movement and the willingness of the reformist NDP leadership to expel the Waffle even at the risk of splitting the party. The power of the right wing leadership was transparently clear and the relationship of forces would not have been qualitatively different at the subsequent ONDP convention, even if the Waffle leadership had decided to appeal the Riverdale Resolution, which resulted in their forced exit from the party, and which called for the disbanding and gagging of the Waffle and gave the leadership the authority to carry this out. And finally, in outlining the circumstances which resulted in the Waffle's being driven from the party, we should recall the less than expected support that the Waffle had from the riding delegates, of whom quite a few succumbed to the compromise demagoguery of the party machine.

The options for the Waffle in this situation were in essence to accept the Riverdale Resolution restrictions and disband or to stay and fight within the party, which would almost certainly have meant expulsion at the subsequent ONDP convention. The Orillia Council meeting constituted clear cut notice by the NDP leadership that a) they would be satisfied with nothing less than the total (*disbanding*) of the Waffle and b) that they were prepared to go to any length to finish off the Waffle, including expulsions, even if they had to be carried out over the outcry of more than half the party membership. In this context, the option chosen by the Waffle — and the last page has not yet been written — since as even the P.C. majority nominally admits the direction of the Waffle is still unclear — can not be described as simply a split, an exit, a defection or a desertion.

Even now, without an active intervention in the NDP, the Waffle still commands broader influence in the NDP than the Left Caucus does. In fact, to this point, the Wafflers have not made an irreversible break in the NDP* (*and still maintain membership in the NDP) as well as a line of communication to the better and more dynamic elements within the party.)

Are revolutionists committed at all times to "stay and fight" in the NDP? It is interesting to examine the P.C. majority's comments in the Political Resolution on this point.

But first, let us recall our traditional position. In 1966, we described the hardening process in the NDP and subsequently we concluded that the NDP was the focus of our politics but not necessarily the centre of our activity. We disengaged our forces (too much, in my opinion) from the NDP and oriented to the student movement and the anti-war movement for a period of time in the sixties.

We were right to characterize the NDP as the focus of our politics because that's where the best elements of the working class were and are — even though the Waffle leadership may have an overly hasty assessment that they might be elsewhere — and because no significant sector of the working class have broken from the NDP, a point Wafflers have on occasion conceded, speaking of a return to the NDP when the smoke has cleared.

The important question we must deal with is whether we, as revolutionists (though we probably would not have allowed ourselves to be cornered and trapped into the same situation) would not have done the same thing, substantially as the Waffle did, and turned those dynamic new forces to the task of party building --or as the Waffle calls it, movement building of a "true socialist party".

In its simplest terms, our NDP orientation is essential to bring us into contact with radicalizing and politically developing layers of the working class, which at this stage happens to be youth.

The Waffle represented the conjunction of this radicalizing current with the existing political structures of Canada's working class.

Reduced to its essence, our function was and is, to bring to these radicalizing forces our full program of revolutionary Marxism. Hence, our NDP orientation is consistent with our Leninism. We are out to win these radicalizing layers to Bolshevism and not to try to win them over almost entirely on yesterday's potatoes, the strategic importance of the NDP, which many of them felt we were selling ad nauseum.

e) The P.C. majority's NDP line has become unhinged

At this point, let us look at the P.C. majority's written position which attempts to rationalize a schematic and uncritical approach to the NDP, which essentially resulted from their recoiling from the Waffle's alleged "nationalist deviation."

The following surprising formulations find their way into the Political Resolution:

"The Waffle defection, the only split in the NDP to this point. was a split along **nationalist** lines that took very little of the party's base. There have been no signs of splits to the left of the NDP by any significant body of workers. On the contrary, class conscious workers still tend to be attracted to the NDP."

With the considerable growth of Canadian autonomy pressures in the trade unions, how can we say with any certainty that the "nationalists (and no longer socialists?) took very little of the party's base"? Evidently, this issue is beginning to have quite an impact. Hence, nationalism can still rear its ugly head in the future within the NDP; perhaps from the very same trade unions who voted to boot the Waffle out of the party?

"We are not fetishists," the political resolution continues. "In a **revolutionary** upsurge of the class, all the class's organizations are challenged. Not just the NDP but the trade unions may be bypassed in favour of new forms thrown up in the course of the struggle (action committees, soviets) which more adequately express the needs of the struggle for power."- (emphasis in original--H.K.)

This almost amounts to saying we are not fetishists because we are fetishists. That's a pretty long lease on life to assign to the NDP's social democratic leadership from this early stage of the struggle. While we have traditionally held that the NDP will not be bypassed and that it has hegemony over the politics of the working class at present and for the coming period, we have never assigned the NDP the hallowed place as the organization of the working class until the revolution.

(See Part 2 following)

(Part 2 of 2)

What has happened to the following cautioning aspects of our 1970 document on the NDP: "In this period of extreme national and international crises" -- when class antagonisms recurringly take on the most explosive character -- how can one estimate with any degree of accuracy, even over a very limited period of time, where the working class is at, at what stage is its consciousness, and how firm is its adherence to various structures and to various forms of struggle?"

The P.C. majority has gone overboard. Where does this place the role of the revolutionary party which in many **pre-revolutionary** upsurges will flesh out its precious forces and be able to present a real challenge to the reformists' smug, but not unshakeable hegemony over the politically developing Canadian working class, which still lacks the strong historically routed ties that the British working class appears to have to **Labour** (to the BLP - *British Labour Party*) (emphasis by the author).

Where in the P.C. document is the succinct and eminently dialectical formulation that the NDP is both on the road and in the road to socialism? As the NDP gains in strength and influence, it also becomes more rotten. We don't formally divide our orientation to the NDP into two phases, one where the NDP is progressive and advances political consciousness and requires us to mute our criticisms and another phase during which the NDP takes power and becomes an instrument of class collaboration.

Yet the prolific writers of the Political Resolution could not find room anywhere in their lengthy document to reaffirm our traditional analysis of the NDP and to indicate agreement with the note-worthy 1970 document which embodies this analysis, *Our Orientation to the NDP: The Strategy and its Tactical Application*.

A number of comments are in order here on *Labor Challenge*, Sept. 25/72 which gave entirely uncritical support of the NDP during the federal elections in October. While it is true that our press sometimes has to play a dual function in speaking for the left forces in the NDP, we generally try to do so indirectly or through signed articles. The editorial in question however does not fall into this category, it does not address itself to the NDP ranks, but is a totally uncritical presentation of the NDP presumably to the public at large.

(Ed note: 3 quotes from the LC editorial line follow)

"The NDP is a class alternative to the capitalist parties. Its election to power promises not only many needed reforms for working people and the poor; not only class legislation aiding the organization of the unorganized workers" (tell that to the B.C. labour movement which is battling with the NDP government in B.C. for the repeal of anti-labor laws -- H.K.).

"... but the election of NDP governments to power constitutes big strides in the path that the working class of this country are going to take towards breaking not only from capitalist electoral politics but from **capitalism as a system** (my emphasis -- H.K.)

"The working class and the oppressed in Canada organized politically in a Labor Party based on the trade union movement is a powerful potential (to be sure-H.K.) force against capitalism... It is through the NDP that the political consciousness of the working-class in Canada is being **forged and shaped**" (my emphasis --H.K.)

Is the class consciousness against "capitalism as a system" really being "forged and shaped" by the NDP experience — asks the uninitiated militant and puzzled *Labor Challenge* reader? He would hardly know what the editors really mean is that this consciousness is only being forged to the extent that conscious socialists intervene in the party and with a program that points out the socialist solutions. The last thing our poor reader would surmise is that *Labor Challenge* is really out to build a mass revolutionary socialist party that can really move in on the radicalization and make sure that the fledgling mobilization of the class doesn't become lost and disillusioned on the quagmire of a Schreyer-like liberal-reformism.

It is also necessary to state that a great deal of the consciousness of the class has been forged entirely outside the NDP -- in the antiwar movement, the women's and youth radicalization — and even the issue of foreign domination injected by the Waffle.

What was going through the heads of the editorial board late that night and since? What, did they hope to achieve with this article? Who was it aimed at?

Given that the press is aimed at the most conscious militants in the NDP and at revolutionary socialists who was it declaiming all this uncritical euphoria about the NDP to? It was addressed to the other side of the coin of the NDP leadership. It was an inverse and twisted polemic with the Waffle, which *Labor Challenge* accused, only three issues previously, of deserting the struggle and to which it now pointed out in great simplistic detail the centrality of the NDP to socialist strategy. In the process of so doing, *Labor Challenge* clearly went overboard all the way to a fetishistic fixation on the NDP. To pull this off, the PC majority had to paint up the NDP in pretty rhetoric, and in the extreme case without a whimper of criticism of the rotten Lewises who had just axed the burgeoning left of the party.

One of the main tasks of our press is to arm the left in the party to deal with the sellouts that Lewis is and will be committing in the name of the class. To be sure, we don't do that in the sectarian simplicity of the Joe Flexers but *Labor Challenge* is entirely remiss in going to the other extreme in acting as a left uncritical appendage in support of the party brass.

It is the height of irony that nowhere in our criticism of Lewis elsewhere during the election did we ever mention the leadership's total sidestepping of the issue of foreign domination, their dragging out during the entire campaign the simple but effective corporate tax ripoff gambit — which to be sure, and in keeping with the times, did inject some class content compared to the previous essentially liberal campaigns of the NDP leadership.

But the issue of Canada-U.S. relations, which the Waffle had posed with such effect in the NDP around the slogan (not ours to be sure) "for an independent socialist Canada" (*a slogan never debated rationally in our movement --web Ed.*) had become a non-issue not only for Lewis but also for the editors of *Labor Challenge* — albeit for entirely different reasons.

Wafflers would have just cause to feel betrayed by *Labor Challenge*, and it is sure that our calls for the building of a revolutionary vanguard party, insofar as they were made in an introductory way, fell on closed ears for Wafflers and elements leaning in their direction as we spent most of our pages in lecturing them on the long term strategic position that the NDP will occupy. With such a formalistic juxtaposition of our traditional tasks, we could only end up removing ourselves from an effective intervention in the plentiful, radical raw material that has emerged from the turbulent Waffle experience in the NDP.

Neither did we see the last of this overly uncritical stance in the election. It was evident in the Jan. 22/73 editorial in which *Labor Challenge* dealt with the Throne Speech debate. This editorial did not express our concept of critical support of the NDP as a labour party but instead got

bogged down in the parliamentary predicaments of its completely rotten leadership. It was not oriented to giving advice to the left wing in how to struggle against the brass, but to giving advice to the NDP leadership itself as to how it should handle itself.

The ultra-left forces would have us, of course, be preaching to the converted about the sellout and "collusion" of Lewis for not forcing a mid-winter election right then and there, but there are some situations on which it is wisest not to comment at all. The major responsibility of *Labor Challenge* was primarily to expose before the party ranks the Lewis leadership's total failure to project concrete alternatives, to counter the parties of big business, to put them on the defensive and in that way to stall off an election.

The LSA/LSO has no obligation to take a position right or wrong on every manoeuvre of Lewis in his phony "balance of power" let alone helping the reformists find a way out the mess they've gotten themselves in while being "responsible to Parliament." To do so tends to identify us too much with the brass and their limited perspective, rather than allowing us to stand back and explain the source of the problem (--) the failure of reformism.

There have been earlier and significant signs of the growing catharsis of our NDP work, dating back to the period before the Waffle purge. These criticisms deal not so much with the theory as with the practical aspects of our intervention in the Waffle and the NDP. For instance, the Young Socialists, in my opinion, with their fascination with the concept of a "Red University" have never had a correct sustained orientation to the Waffle since its inception. In the early days when the Waffle first organized a demonstration on the resources sellout issue, but campus forces tended to stand aside and in part we echoed Trudeau's famous line, "If we have water to spare, why not sell it?"

In addition, we kept lecturing the Waffle -- who were not internationalists (but who nevertheless came out to demonstrate) -- that Vietnam was the main issue anyway and that the working-class could not be really radicalized on the issue of energy resources in any case.

The PC majority's vision of having the YS (*the LSA's affiliated Young Socialists*) act as the campus wing of the Waffle was destined to fail with this approach.

Given the unevenness and the low level of sophistication of some of our approaches to the Waffle, it was in my opinion also wrong to characterize the Waffle as left reformist -- a position we formalized in the 1971 plenum document.

This position is, of course, theoretically defensible -- we made exceptions and characterized Laxer, who more than anyone else shaped the Waffle strategy, as a centrist -- but our characterization tended to shift our intervention into a negative rather than affirmative mode.

To be sure, the hostility to Trotskyism of Watkins and our erstwhile "left reformists" like Jackie Larkin made our intervention as revolutionary socialists quite difficult at times -- but dubbing the Waffle with the same basic definition we apply to the NDP leadership was tactically incorrect. In practice this increased the tendency of comrades to remain on the outside of the Waffle and especially so on the campuses from where the Waffle drew most of its new forces.

It would have served our needs better to have characterized the Waffle more precisely as left social-democratic, and containing many centrist elements including some individuals which were independently coming to revolutionary socialist conclusions.

In abstracting the youth radicalization per se -- presumably free of the pernicious nationalism of the Waffle -- the present political resolution on the other hand is nowhere near as

reluctant in describing the implicitly assumed revolutionary aspirations of the radicalizing mass movements.

I'm raising this point because I think it is an early point of departure for understanding and explaining the PC "majority's present about-face on the question of nationalism in English Canada and it serves as an example of their stale and narrow application of our Trotskyist theory to the situation confronting us today.

f) Re-establishing a left wing in the NDP

At what stage of development is the NDP, the first labor party in North America? Despite the fact that (it) is in power in three Western provinces, it is still some distance away from gaining power federally. In Ontario, the major centre of economic power in Canada, with half the country's manufacturing and service industry, it remains the third ranking party. Its electoral support among organized labour has remained nearly constant at almost a third of the unionized vote. In B.C. and Manitoba, the NDP came to power not so much because of an upsurge by the working class as much as because of the disintegration of the old party formations.

How close then is the NDP to being a hardened social democratic formation — the traditional disciplinarian of the working class at the service of capital in the traditions of Wilson's Labour Party or Willy Brandt's (*West German social-democrat*) SPD?

For one thing, Canadian capitalism hasn't been pushed into having to resort to its labour lieutenants despite Lewis's offering — and not so much that the "NDP presents Canada's capitalists with a considerable problem" as the Political Resolution puts it. In Ontario and points east, the NDP is still very much on the outside, looking in. However, it does have an established base and a distinct and growing chance of taking power in the time span of a decade or less.

Can the right-wing consolidate its power and once again harden the NDP as they did in the first half of the sixties? Despite the purge of the Waffle, the NDP is still open to the crosswinds of the radicalization. The leadership has lots of leeway to take a left posture and has been able, in the absence of an organized opposition, to adopt many of the longstanding positions of the left, advocating public ownership of Bell and a takeover of the oil and gas companies. The corporate welfare bum issue gave Lewis a flashy but inexpensive mantle against big business though it functioned at the same time to shield a more penetrating look at the ills of the branch plant economy.

The composition of the NDP today indicates that it is still attracting a considerable number of younger elements with a significant number of those wide open to socialist and revolutionary ideas. The bulk of this activist element is sympathetic to the Waffle and hostile to the brass's purge of the Waffle. But wider layers of the party who are committed to the leadership continue to be affected by debates on women, foreign ownership, U.S. domination of Canada's economy, the issue of public ownership, Vietnam and a number of other issues.

The party is also increasing its support among the traditionally petit-bourgeois elements, teachers, professionals, women, white collar workers and other social layers being affected (*by*) the radicalization.

There are no guarantees (nor do we require them) that the leadership of the NDP will not be able to harden the party and enforce its stringent reformism on all the sections of it. At present and in the next period, this hardening trend doesn't appear too likely and the openings exist for a sustained and intelligent intervention, albeit on a much more modest scale than that represented by the Waffle. While it is unlikely, it is not entirely excluded that many Waffle adherents could be

reactivated in the NDP, especially if some initial momentum were to impel a new left wing forward, or if the leadership were wracked by new crises.

The most deepseated issue in the New Democratic Party is still the issue of foreign domination -- the question of the looting of Canada's resources by giant U.S. corporations at the expense of their development in the interest of the Canadian people. It poses in turn the question of the direction of our economy as a branch plant economy faced with total integration into the continental economy and at the service of mainly American imperialist multinational corporations in which the Canadian capitalist class is a willing and compliant junior partner out to squeeze every last drop of profits from the English Canadian and Québécois workers.

This is an awareness which is rapidly spreading through all but the most sheltered sections of Canadian life, which is permeating the NDP and is also beginning to take hold among broad layers of Canadian workers (as reflected in the Canadian union autonomy movement), as the honeymoon of Canada's special relationship is being jolted by Nixonomics.

It is an awareness intricately related to the innate weakness of Canadian capitalism, its dependent economy and the present threats to all but its resource exports without which it cannot sustain the highest relative influx of manufactured goods of any advanced capitalist country in the world.

Any Left Caucus which does not connect with and develop this deepening radicalization which is the essence of this new nationalism is condemned to be a gutless wonder from the start.

It has been noted by the P.C. majority that the NDP has made some small but significant gains among the younger white collar and professional strata. It is my impression that the issue which has been most influential in breaking this element away from their traditional capitalist voting pattern has been the awakening of foreign domination, including the distortion and limitation of Canadian technology, manufacturing, the export of jobs, the brain drain, all of which have made this layer receptive to concepts of public ownership, to elemental socialist ideas.

An interesting challenge faces the pan-Canadian section in developing a program for the upcoming Federal Convention of the NDP. Aside from issues on which we have a clearly defined position, such as women, Quebec, Vietnam, etc., we must rejuvenate and develop, rather than dump, our program on foreign domination of resources and the economy. All the more is this important because the MacKenzie Pipeline and the Arctic development will probably be the major economic issue at the B.C. convention.

The NDP left wing has an opportunity to confront the party with the need for a program which begins with a moratorium and a thorough stocktaking of resource exploitation, and demands public ownership under workers control of all facets of the resource industry, and its diversification into secondary manufacturing and processing.

Also on the agenda for the NDP is the question of public ownership of the banks which funnel Canadian portfolio capital abroad and underwrite the U.S. takeovers. Clearly the question of a planned, socialist economy directed by and run for the benefit of the working people of this country is posed in a most auspicious manner.

On the question of the Federal Caucus' role in the illusory balance of power situation, an issue which will recede into the background, we should not fall into the trap of the sectarians or get hung up on the way Lewis ended up voting to stave off a winter election. Rather than denouncing the "collusion" and "sellout" of Lewis -- charges which, at best, are difficult to substantiate -- we must direct our fire at their passive, almost totally uncritical acceptance of the pittance thrown to the

aged and working people and the failure of the brass to project thoroughgoing, socialist alternatives which could enable the NDP to retain the initiative in going into the inevitable elections.

With regard to the scandalous rip-offs in the food industry, the left might well ask why the NDP was hamstrung to this effete parliamentary committee? Why could it not move beyond the parliamentary confines, and call for a rollback of the record profits of the food industry (31% increase in 1972)? Why did the NDP not call for protests and demonstrations at the House by labour and sectors of the NDP? Why can the party not encourage irate housewives and initiate neighbourhood action committees on food prices by women, trade unionists, pensioners, etc.? Why could they not call for a seizure of the books of the big wholesale and distribution conglomerates that bilk their own workers, and farmers and the consumers? And why not counterpose public ownership of any non-compliant corporation?

Also, why is the NDP leadership not taking any steps to build a labour-socialist based alternative press so clearly needed when 'you look at the results of the last Ontario election'?

The NDP leadership too is faced with important problems in its treatment of labour issues. Now that the unions are being forced increasingly to turn to a political offensive with the wave of anti-labour legislation and fulminating hate-labour propaganda in the media, (while) the party brass is taking a tongue-in-cheek approach (viz., [B.C. NDP Premier] Barrett and his *(inherited Social Credit government.)* Sacred labour laws) and Lewis and his urgings of "hold the line" and no more "extravagant" wage demands to the 1972 CLC convention. Where is the NDP confronting the capitalist class with the demand for full employment, for a shorter work week at the same pay rate, for a redistribution of work to eliminate the built-in unemployment for which workers, not the corporate welfare bums, are paying the major costs? Where is the demand for a sliding scale of wages and hours to keep pace with inflation? Where is the NDP demanding meaningful and socially purposeful work for the many young people, for the women who are entering the work force? Where is there anything in the NDP program to put the new technology and automation to the benefit of the working people first, for technology to cease being the exclusive prerogative of management and its ossified, antiquated structures? Where is the NDP's support to and program for organizing white collar and women workers?

Many of these issues in addition to the ones already adopted bear developing as our forces in the left caucus, attempt to work out a program together with militants in other sections of the NDP.

Such a programmatic challenge to the brass is a prerequisite to bring into motion indigenous forces in the NDP's rank and file. With such a program, we can begin to demonstrate the inadequacy of the liberal-reformist leadership of the NDP, to establish ourselves as the socialists in the NDP ranks, to gain a hearing from the most conscious elements within the party for our full revolutionary socialist program expressed by *Labor Challenge*. If circumstances permit and the left forces in the party can bring wider layers to unite in a challenge to the party leadership around a socialist program, around a program which provides answers and solutions to the key problems Canada's working class is faced with, around a transitional program, than the possibilities of rebuilding a left wing in the party will increase immeasurably. And in this way too, we will avoid the narrow sectarian, ouvrierist approach of the manifesto writers and also the P.C. majority's unwarranted and sterile crusade against "nationalist deviation".

g) Conclusions

With the advantage of hindsight on our NDP work in the past few months, the following conclusions are in order.

In practice in our adaptation to the ultralefts in the Left Caucus on one hand and to the party brass on the other hand (most clearly seen in *Labour Challenge's* totally uncritical endorsement of the NDP brass during the elections) we can see that the PC majority's NDP line is floundering on troubled waters indeed.

In essence the (*our LSA advice --ed.*) "stay and fight" simplicity of the Delaware conference was more prompted by the PC majority's mission against the Waffle's supposed cop-out on socialism in favour of nationalism, of which there isn't a shred of evidence, than on a realistic assessment of where the ONDP was at after Orillia.

In the leadership's formulation of our NDP orientation, this has reflected itself in a distorted elevation of the tactical aspects; that is, the scope and level of our intervention in the NDP at any given time, to an over-commitment, almost an article of faith. **This flows from the anti-Waffle fury of the PC majority. As a byproduct, we see the euphoric lapses in our press, the muting of our criticism of the NDP leadership, which cannot be explained in any other context.** (*Ed highlight*)

Rather than more soberly assessing the post-Orillia situation in the NDP and accepting the Waffle's action as more good than bad or at least recognizing that they were presented with a fait accompli, the PC majority set the movement up for total exclusion from this formation, with its stupid scuttling of our established line on the new nationalism and its false preachings in the name of our NDP orientation. In the process we removed ourselves from hundreds of rapidly radicalizing new socialist elements, many of which are wide open to revolutionary ideas. How else, but from primarily a Leninist vantage point can one explain our NDP strategy to such radicalizing forces?

Ironically, at the same time we could have been able to continue our NDP orientation and no doubt convince quite a few of the Wafflers and MISC*-Wafflers (**Movement for an Independent Socialist Canada, the successor to Waffle outside the NDP -- Web Ed.*) of our correct strategy to the NDP and in that way we would have more weight in any future irreversible rejection of the NDP by the Waffle.

However, back in the Left Caucus, thanks to the ultralefts and the PC majority's naive adaptations to them, the task of rebuilding the NDP left wing in Ontario is today not much further ahead than it was at the Delaware conference. Given the paralysis of the leadership, our NDP intervention is grinding to a halt and is today more rhetoric than substance.

The fruits of the PC majority's new found wisdom on the question of nationalism have proven to be an unmitigated disaster for our forces in the NDP.

April 5, 1973